

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
August 26, 2014 at 7:00 pm

Members present:

Ermete J. Raffaelli, Chairman
Brian J. Burket, Vice Chairman
Michael E. Lauter, Secretary
Wayne Jonas Bealer, Assistant Secretary

Staff present:

Andrew W. Miller, Planning Office
Deborah A.S. Hoag, Department of Public Works

Others present:

Charles F. Frantz III, Forino Company LP
Michael J. Bingham, Forino Company LP
David R. Owens, Overhead Door Co. of Reading
Robert J. Andryszak, RK&K Engineers LLP
Michael A. Sulpizio, RK&K Engineers LLP
Jeff Grow, RK&K Engineers LLP
Ralph E. Johnson, Department of Public Works
Amy L. Morriss, Department of Public Works
Gregg A. Bogia, Bogia Engineering Inc.
Garreth Donly, Our City-Reading Inc.

Chairman Raffaelli called the August meeting to order, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Miller asked that they add a reaffirmation of their approvals of the 'Iglesia Cristiana' land development plan. Mr. Burket moved to accept the August 26th agenda, as modified. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the revised August agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Reading Overhead Door-Proposed Storage Building – final annexation and land development plan [0:01.12]

Mr. Bingham distributed some 'half sets' of the plan for the Commission members. He introduced himself, and described the project as a 3300-square-foot 'pole barn'. He confirmed that the new construction is limited to one of the existing four parcels proposed for annexation; that currently known as 919 Delta Avenue. Asked about the input of Muhlenberg Township, where one of the parcels sits (2308 Kutztown Road), Mr. Frantz said their role was limited to the Letter of Map Amendment (LOMA) process, wherefore they signed the 'community acknowledgement form' required by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Mr. Miller asked if they communicated anything regarding curb and sidewalk on Delta Avenue and Kutztown Road. Mr. Frantz said they had not. Mr. Miller thought the County Planners would want to see some input from the Township. He asked about additional information on the street topography and dimensions. Mr. Bingham said they continue to research that issue, and would likely be contacting the City. He said they weren't expecting to change that topography in any way, by curbing or any new entrances. Mr. Miller requested a written request for any waivers being sought. Amid discussion about the current extents of curb and sidewalk, Mr. Owens described the proposal as an attempt to organize his product 'under roof', and provide shelter for his vehicles in the winter. He cited the costs associated with curb and sidewalk as enough to cancel the project. He said the neighbors want the storage building for the improved appearance of material that is currently scattered about the yard. Mr. Raffaelli asked about the existing curbing. Mr. Owens said it is there, but for gaps around Kutztown Road and its radius to Delta Avenue where it never existed. Mr. Bealer indicated that most of the area at issue would be under the Township's jurisdiction. Mr. Owens mentioned a guardrail as a barrier to the practical use of any sidewalk. Mr. Frantz said they agreed to some landscaping as a condition of the zoning approval. Asked if the building was limited to storage, Mr. Owens said yes, with electric service (for lighting) as the only utility extension. He said there'd be no change in staffing levels as a direct result of the project. He confirmed that sidewalk already exists in those areas where it would most likely be used; entrances to the business and at the designated bus stop. Asked if the new building would be heated, he said not. Interior lighting and some exterior 'wall packs' require the electric service. Asked for the recommendation, Mr. Miller stressed the need to clarify the street topography, and reminded that Kutztown Road is covered by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT). Mr. Bealer mentioned the intended parcel consolidation and the Planning Office's comment about the municipal boundary, considering the possibility of a

taxing complication. Mr. Owens thought it 'silly' to leave that one piece in the Township. Mr. Miller noted that it wouldn't automatically change with the annexation of the parcels. He expected the County Planners would have taken a more certain position, and was himself unsure of the simplest arrangement. He hesitated to complicate the zoning (especially setback) issues. He recommended the plan be tabled until some of the other permits are secured, and mentioned having received the County Planning Commission's review. It cited 'inconsistency' with the County's comprehensive plan, due to the floodplain issue, while acknowledging the approved map amendment. He asked if the applicant had any specific issues or questions with the staff reviews. Mr. Frantz said not, but for the curb and sidewalk issues. Mr. Miller asked that the existing condition plan show the current extents accurately, and that they forward a written request for the waivers. He asked about the Conservation District's approval (from December) of an erosion control plan that didn't define a 'limit of disturbance'. Mr. Frantz said they'd check the 'layers' in the drawing file. Ms. Hoag asked about an easement for the City's continuing access to the stormwater infrastructure at the rear of the property, specifically whether one was recorded. She mentioned work on the inlet structure from the mid 1980s, and an easement shown on a plan from that time. Mr. Frantz offered to research the matter. Asked about the features labeled as 'Exide manholes', Ms. Hoag explained that the nearby Exide plant (General Battery and Ceramic Corp.) had previously discharged their process wastewater, following on-site treatment, directly to the Bernhart Creek. It has since been connected to the City's storm sewers and conveyed to the Schuylkill River, for the advantages in the latter's discharge limits. The Commission members continued discussion of the curb and sidewalk, ultimately expressing their intent to waive the requirements. Mr. Miller preferred to make the official action a part of the final vote, but noted its bearing on the scope of an improvements agreement. Mr. Frantz intended to have revised plans submitted within the next week, in time for the September meeting.

Mr. Lauter moved to table the final plan for the storage building, pending the required revisions and other approvals. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the 'Reading Overhead Door' final plan.

Fritz Island WWTP Facilities Upgrade Project – final land development plan [0:35.37]

Mr. Johnson introduced himself and the design team, and briefly described the division of the 'liquid' and 'solids' contracts. Mr. Andryszak described their involvement in what he estimated to be a \$100 million project, and provided an overview of the Fritz Island topography and the Plant's liquid and solid (sludge) operations, as well as its administrative, laboratory and maintenance facilities. He said the consent decree – between the City, the United States Department of Justice (USDOJ), the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP) – requires improvements in the treatment processes and the effluent quality. The design will eliminate the current hydraulic 'bottlenecks' within the Plant, and will provide for nutrient removal should future regulations require it. The consent decree requires that construction be completed by February 28, 2018, and be fully operational six months later. The Plant is being designed for an average daily flow 20.5 million gallons per day, per the City's Act 537 Sewage Facilities Plan, and for handling peak flows of just over 84 million gallons per day (considering rain infiltration). The Plant must also operate through flood stages in the Schuylkill River. The sludge disposal is expected to average 26.5 tons per day, which will be 'stabilized' prior to disposal in a landfill.

Mr. Grow summarized the other required permitting, and the status of those applications. They include an application to the Delaware River Basin Commission (the docket submitted in June, for an approval expected in September) consistent with a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit received in 2013. A second part of the NPDES permitting will cover water quality management in the construction phase. Other requisites include a Water Obstruction and Encroachment 'joint permit' between the US Army Corps of Engineers and the PADEP, an erosion and sedimentation control plan to be approved by the Berks County Conservation District, and an air quality determination from the PADEP. Most of these applications were expected to be made in the following month, if they hadn't already been, and will be itemized on the plan itself. He assured that the Plant must maintain treatment operations during and throughout the construction period. He said the floodways would not be impacted, and that there will be no encroachment on the delineated wetlands. A bog turtle habitat assessment has been submitted to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and a redbelly turtle assessment and mitigation plan to the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. No bald eagles were found 'in close proximity', but the construction specifications will prohibit blasting.

Mr. Andryszak mentioned some of the challenges in renovating the Plant's aging buildings, including known asbestos and lead hazards. He said heavy metals have been found in the existing site fill, and additional sampling is underway in an attempt to quantify it. Old trickling filters, with mercury seals, are another possible abatement issue. Anything found will be included as appendices in the construction documents, and will require a site-specific health and safety plan. He reiterated that the work will develop under two separate contracts. The approximately \$72 million (in construction) liquid-treatment phase will see the conversion of the existing trickling

filters to an activated-sludge system. They're working toward a 'notice to proceed' and an expected start by February 15, 2015. Construction is projected to last three years. The solids improvement contract includes the upgrade of the existing sludge-thickening process, which will allow for smaller digesters in the stabilization phase, and improvements in the de-watering technologies. It includes the new administrative, laboratory and maintenance buildings, effectively replacing the previous 'Utilities Administration Building' plan, reviewed by the Commission in August 2009 but never pursued. It will provide offices for those currently working from temporary trailers. A third contract, already underway, will improve two anaerobic digesters (Nos. 4 and 5) intended to be finished within a year and handle treatment during shutdowns elsewhere in the Plant. He described the liquid system's main components: from primary clarification, to the activated sludge reactors, the aeration tanks, the blower and its building, the final clarifiers, a pumping station, the chlorine disinfection and discharge structure. The design includes improvements to the odor-control systems. Noise, primarily from the blower will be contained by its 80-by 50-foot masonry building. He explained that as the 'bugs' eat the sewage, their population must be balanced with the quantity of sludge. A minimum 15 minutes of 'chlorine contact' completes the process before the effluent is released to the River over a 40-foot-wide by 10-foot-tall stepped outfall structure, which serves to provide additional aeration (except during high-water events). He said the process is always driven by gravity, even in a 100-year flood event. A programmable logic control (SCADA) system will be upgraded, with all necessary hardware and software included in the liquid contract and to be integrated with the solids treatment. The scope of the solids system improvements are mainly in the renovation of existing buildings and tanks; a cost-savings measure. Digester Nos. 1, 2 and 3 will be upgraded, including new covers for odor mitigation. They will refurbish the existing gravity-belt thickeners and replace the belt-filter presses with new centrifuges; an improvement in the de-watering process for a thicker sludge, which will reduce the disposal costs. Sludge will spend 15 days in the anaerobic digesters, where the gases produced – about two-thirds CH₄, a third CO₂ with trace H₂S and others – can be returned to fuel the digesters' heaters. Following the de-watering in the centrifuges, the sludge is emptied into dumpsters for transport to a landfill.

The new administration building is being designed by Seiler & Drury Architects. A new gate will control access to the Plant. A new maintenance facility will consolidate the related offices with truck bays, painting and welding shops.

Mr. Andryszak said the existing flow was analyzed for its strength and characteristics, by EnviroSim Associates Ltd., to determine the nitrification (removal of ammonia) needs. That analysis revealed a 'strong mix' of domestic and industrial flows. He noted some of the redundancies in the design, intended to provide continuing service through problems and shutdowns. They include a spare aeration blower, return and waste-activated sludge pumps, chlorination equipment and chlorine-removal systems (sulfur dioxide), spare blowers for aerating the discharged effluent during high-water events, an additional final clarifier, and extra valves and 'gates' anywhere they prefer to be able to isolate equipment. The SCADA system will provide constant monitoring of the systems.

Mr. Sulpizio addressed the design elevations, for any concerns about encroachments on the River. He explained the differences between the *floodway* and the 100-year and 500-year *floodplains*. He noted one particular depression in the eastern part of the Plant, dubbed the 'bowl area', and the backwater characteristics of the 'Mifflin Arm' of the River along the Island's south and west. He said that, as part of the Chapters 105 and 106 permitting, PADEP agreed that the flood-insurance rate maps had some inaccuracies in its representation of the floodplain boundaries, though they had considered the 'worst-case scenario' in the design. He stated that there would be no impacts to the base-flood elevations, and that all buildings would be above 100-year elevation by the 1½ feet required, if not 2½ feet. Asked if the fill was merely an environmental and safety concern, or affected foundation design as well, he said they'll be using pile foundations in areas where the coal ash is a concern. Mr. Andryszak said they'd taken plenty of soil borings, and described the top ten feet as coal ash, with better material underneath, all taken into consideration with the grading plan and structural elevations. He said they prefer to keep the excavated material on-site, and have tested it for metal contamination. Some will be used to fill the 'bowl area'. Asked about the risks of combustibility in the sludge, he said the volatile fraction is broken down in the anaerobic digestion phase, eliminating that risk. Asked if ultraviolet disinfection was a part of the treatment, Mr. Johnson said not as it is currently designed, but referred to a 'second opinion' as it relates to the terms of the Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority (PennVEST) funding. Asked about opportunities for land application of the sludge cake, Ms. Morriss noted the City's previous challenges with metal contaminants, specifically molybdenum. She said the levels have been within acceptable ranges for the last year-and-a-half, but that PADEP will require a more-definitive explanation of how the problem has been permanently solved, before considering land application.

Mr. Lauter asked about the comparative treatment costs, before and after the construction and technological retrofitting. Mr. Andryszak noted some challenges in giving even a rough estimate. He said the aeration systems account for roughly half the power demand, a cost certain to rise. He said the current costs of maintaining a lot of older equipment will be reduced, but only from the substantial investment in a lot of new equipment. Mr. Johnson referred to the costs of 'capital' and debt service, and said the higher quality of treatment will cost more. Mr.

Raffaelli mentioned the fluctuation in energy costs. Asked if staffing levels would factor into that calculation, Mr. Andryszak doubted any significant change would result from the project. He described modern treatment plants as almost 'running themselves', the operators needed for the routine maintenance and breakdowns. Mr. Raffaelli suggested that avoiding additional penalties for the past mistakes could be considered a savings.

Mr. Raffaelli thanked the project team for an 'enlightening' presentation, and asked for the staff recommendations. Mr. Miller mentioned that his review makes a number of requests for more information and clarifications, rather than substantive changes. He advised the plan be tabled until some of the other requisite permits are obtained. He said his focus was on a final document that condenses as much of the relevant permitting and design information as can practically be shown on a land development plan.

Mr. Bealer moved to table the final plan, pending other required reviews and permits. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the 'Fritz Island WWTP Facilities Upgrade Project' plan.

Other business:

modifications to the 'DoubleTree Hotel & Garage Project' record plan [1:40.54]

Though not scheduled, Mr. Raffaelli recognized the attendance of Messrs. Bogia and Donly, an offered a few minutes for them to revisit an issue with the DoubleTree Hotel project that the Commission had addressed the previous month. Mr. Bogia pressed the need to modify the City's standard sidewalk pattern, as Hilton Worldwide considers it a tripping hazard. He distributed a packet of photographs comparing the condition of other downtown blocks, highlighted the deferred maintenance, and the effect of tree roots and freeze/thaw cycles. He hoped to make the Hotel frontage as safe as possible, and minimize its liability. He understood that the Commission had discussed the matter last month, and decided to attend this meeting due to its importance. Mr. Bealer noticed that there were no pictures from directly across the street, affront the Santander Arena. Mr. Bogia said it was harder to highlight their concern in photographs of that block. Mr. Bealer noted the concern for the downtown theme, and felt that as a full-service Hotel they'd have the ability to maintain the pavers just as the Arena has. Mr. Donly noted the apparent uniformity in the settlement, but said that Hilton requested they appeal the Commission's decision. He said they prefer a concrete slab, and are willing to concede colored, stamped concrete to replicate the appearance. He added that street trees will be 'near impossible' because of the location of the underground utility services. Mr. Raffaelli stressed the need for proper installation techniques. He noted many of the photographed examples are around tree pits, the roots having a tendency to lift the pavers as they grow, and others apparently disturbed from utility work. He recalled other areas where missing units simply weren't replaced, and a general lack of even the reasonably-expected maintenance. Mr. Burket wondered how the stamped concrete would compare in appearance. Mr. Donly said they'd attempt to match the standard pattern and color. Mr. Burket noted a variation in the effect of unit pavers. Mr. Bogia stated that the color is added to the mix thoroughly, in the truck, before the pour. Mr. Raffaelli predicted even less attention to cracked and chipped concrete. Mr. Donly said Hilton has strict appearance guidelines, requiring a cosmetic refurbishing every seven years, and considers the site 'from the curbline in'. Mr. Raffaelli referred to the problems experienced with the sidewalks and pedestrian elements of other downtown projects, noting that all materials deteriorate and require some periodic maintenance. Mr. Miller asked who specifically made the request; Hilton or, the local owner, Reading Hospitality LLC. Mr. Donly answered 'Hilton', and agreed to provide the contact information. He cited attorneys, and said the liability is shared. He stressed that liability is the primary concern, rather than the maintenance burden, predicting the conventions will bring women 'in high heels' that are more likely to trip on the uneven surfaces of the pavers. Asked about the overall valuation of the project, and the share of public funds allocated, he estimated \$54 million overall, with about \$25 million in public contributions. Discussing the City's standard, Mr. Burket asked if it required the *material* or the *appearance*. Mr. Raffaelli said 'both', and recalled the experience with the light fixtures. Mr. Miller asked about the share of the pavers in relation to the total width of the existing sidewalk in the prevailing pattern. Mr. Bogia estimated three feet in pavers, and about thirteen feet concrete. Mr. Miller wondered why anyone would walk in the three-foot border course of pavers. Mr. Donly mentioned people getting off busses, crossing the street from the Arena, or from nearby restaurants. He said it never hurts to have a conversation, and find a compromise. Mr. Raffaelli thanked them for the presentation, and repeated his assertion that proper installation and maintenance are necessary, whatever the adopted standards. Mr. Lauter thought the plan should stand, as approved, doubting that a waiver for the Hotel would itself effect a new downtown standard. Mr. Bogia said the City should update its standards. Mr. Burket said his position depended on how closely the finished look would match the existing pattern. Mr. Donly said they would eventually be revisiting the tree issue, as well, because of the utilities. Mr. Bogia asked if they should return with sample materials. Mr. Miller wanted to hear from Hilton directly, and intended to research Hilton's other downtown projects in the meantime.

§603.c.2 conditional use review-246 North 9th Street (temporary shelter) [2:35.17]

Mr. Raffaelli wondered about the sufficiency of the second egress. Mr. Miller distributed some last-minute documentation from the Zoning Office that included a brief history of the property, and recommend an approval subject to building-code compliance. Mr. Raffaelli commented on the appearance of the exterior, including its boarded-up windows. Mr. Bealer supported the Zoning Office's findings and recommendations. Mr. Burket indicated his inclination to approve the use. Mr. Bealer said City Light Ministries was trying to do a great thing. He had spoken to the director of the Berks Coalition to End Homelessness Inc., who confirmed the need. He wondered about State oversight of such operations. Mr. Miller recalled it becoming an issue because the operator had pitched some modifications to the building inspectors, their first indication of any occupancy besides the church. Mr. Raffaelli, reading from the Zoning Office report, noted that conditions already required from a 1986 inspection were never satisfied. Mr. Bealer felt that it would be handled differently, given the recent attention, and noted the applicant's willingness to install a sprinkler system, among other investments. Mr. Raffaelli thought the application left some questions, but deferred to the architect who'd be sealing the drawings.

Mr. Lauter moved to recommend that City Council grant the conditional use based on the building-code conditions enumerated by the Zoning Administrator. Mr. Bealer seconded, clarifying that all applicable building and fire protection codes must be met. And the Commission voted unanimously to forward a recommendation to City Council to approve the temporary shelter at 246 North 9th Street.

Resolution #23-2014

review the draft July 22, 2014 meeting minutes [2:47.24]

Mr. Bealer requested one correction. Mr. Burket moved to accept the July meeting minutes, with the edit. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the July 22nd meeting minutes.

Resolution #24-2014

Discussion continued on the requested modifications to the DoubleTree Hotel plan.

§513.a approval reaffirmation-Iglesia Cristiana [2:55.16]

Mr. Miller explained that it had been another three months, and there apparently remains an issue with the municipal improvements agreement. He said he wasn't sure of the details, but had assured the developer that he'd keep the approval current.

Mr. Burket moved to reaffirm the final plan approval for the Iglesia Cristiana expansion. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to a third reaffirmation of their June 2013 final plan approval, Resolution No. 19-2013, for Iglesia Cristiana.

Resolution #25-2014

Mr. Bealer inquired about the condition of the sidewalk in the 700 block of Oley Street (beneath the railroad crossing). Ms. Hoag acknowledged its deteriorating condition, and recounted their frustrations in determining responsibility, and arranging the funding and logistic considerations. She said the Public Works Department has attempted to secure it with signs and barricades, to varying effect.

Mr. Miller asked how the Commission wants to handle unscheduled business, in the future. He supported an opportunity for 'public comment', and mentioned the time limits allotted by City Council. Ms. Hoag noted the different limits for agenda topics and miscellaneous business. Mr. Lauter suggested that if not already scheduled, they should be making their case when the agenda is being adopted. He thought the Commission should have the opportunity and discretion to modify the agenda or not, and referred to the technical rules of order. Ms. Hoag suggested an opportunity for short statements, and direction to submit 'hard copies' for review ahead of the following meeting. Mr. Miller summarized the preference for a loose enforcement of time limits, with consideration given at the beginning of meeting. Mr. Lauter realized the members couldn't feed the conversation themselves, if intending to maintain those boundaries.

Mr. Bealer moved to adjourn the August meeting. Mr. Burket seconded. And the meeting adjourned, without objection. – 22:09p